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## **Levin, Stabenow Announce \$500,000 Awarded to the Northern Economic Alliance**

WASHINGTON – Senators Carl Levin, D-Mich., and Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., announced today that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has awarded a Rural Business Enterprise Grant of \$500,000 to the Northern Lakes Economic Alliance. The funds will be used to implement the Alliance's Value-Added Agriculture Business Development Program.

"Northern Michigan has experienced increasing loss of its agriculture base," said Levin. "The Northern Lake Alliance will create new jobs and better the overall economy of this region which relies so heavily on agriculture. I am pleased the USDA awarded this grant, and I applaud the Alliance for providing the resources that will help local farmers succeed."

"As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I work hard to ensure that our state's unique needs are addressed. I am happy that the USDA has chosen to support the work of the Northern Lake Alliance, which aids farmers in three highly agricultural counties," said Stabenow. "The USDA's award will benefit the entire Northern Michigan economy."

The program will assist farmers in a three-county service area through value-added agricultural business development. The objectives of the program are to determine new markets for existing products, identify value-added processing opportunities for existing crops and to select crops not currently grown commercially in the region which may be suited to local soil and climate. It is estimated that the successful implementation of this program will create 11 new full-time positions within Northern Michigan's agriculture industry and save 10 existing positions.

The mission of the Northern Lake Economic Alliance is to enhance the economy in Antrim, Charlevoix and Emmet Counties by acting as a resource to retain and create quality jobs.